

- Provide security for main body through screening operations.

Although the scout platoon is versatile, it is a small unit that can easily be overtaken. A full-strength scout platoon with three squads and a platoon headquarters can normally accomplish two or three separate tasks. Given more, the scouts tend to lose focus on the specifics of each mission. Tasking them with the wrong missions or with too many missions will only lead to disaster. Mission selection is the basis for successful operations.

Successful use of the scouts is a direct result of good planning. Because the scouts normally deploy well before the main body, the planning process is often compressed. As a result, the planning time available must be used carefully. A complete, well-thought-out plan allows the scouts to execute the mission with minimal problems.

Once the plan is complete, it needs to be developed into a full, five-paragraph operations order (OPORD). The scout platoon leader, his plan, and the platoon

OPORD will be only as good as the one provided by the battalion staff.

The accompanying checklist provides a standard format for scout mission planning and ensures that no important details are omitted.

The S-2 needs to be the proponent for all scout operations. Coordination with all other staff sections is important, but it must be the S-2 who ensures that nothing is neglected. If the helicopters don't show up, for example, it may well be the fault of the S-3 air, but it's the S-2's R&S mission.

The S-2 must watch out for the welfare of the scout platoon. Everyone wants something from the scouts—the battalion commander, the HHC commander, the S-3—but nobody is charged with providing for their needs. The scout platoon leader and platoon sergeant must pay close attention to the training, missions, and logistical support of the unit. Working out of the tactical operations center, the scout platoon sergeant can act as the liaison between the scouts and the staff. If he is not available, the

S-2 sections must provide the link. If their administrative and logistical needs are coordinated, the scouts will be free to concentrate on the S-2's collection mission.

Scout operations are the bread and butter of successful R&S plans. The S-2 and the scouts must therefore have a good relationship, one that is based on mutual trust. First, the S-2 lays the groundwork for success by assigning the scouts a mission that fulfills his needs and that they can reasonably accomplish. Second, he develops a workable plan. Third, he takes care of his best intelligence collectors.

These three steps will improve any R&S plan and ultimately improve a battalion's probability of success.

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Cordon and Search

Lessons Learned in Somalia

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Early in 1993 the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry, in Somalia was assigned responsibility for a humanitarian relief sector at Marka. For the next four months, the battalion was involved in security and counterbandit operations along the entire length of the lower Shabelle Valley (Figure 1). These operations included convoy security, show of force, continuous patrolling of the area of operations, and cordon and search.

Cordon and search operations were normally conducted when the battalion received intelligence of bandit operations in a certain area. This intelligence was usually obtained from interrogations or volunteered by local people. (Often these people would inform on each other in an effort to have us go in and disarm their opponents.) Although much of this intelligence had to be accepted with some skepticism, we even-

tually developed a good idea of where selected bandit groups were in the valley.

One of the areas of frequent bandit activity was the airfield south of Afgoi near the small village of Lantabur. This airfield was the main site in the country for the delivery of *khat*, the mildly narcotic stimulant grown in Kenya and chewed by most of the people in Somalia. Its traffic was very profitable, and many of the bandits in the valley either

participated in the khat trade or preyed on the traders. Unfortunately, they also preyed on normal commerce in the valley.

The airfield was a constant hub of activity, and our intelligence about the banditry in the vicinity was fairly consistent. The battalion decided to conduct a cordon and search of this area to catch the bandits in the act. We placed a clandestine observation post (OP) at the airfield, which gave us a confirmed base of intelligence on the periods of maximum activity there.

The reconnaissance plan for the operation called for the antiarmor section of Company A to be inserted on 13 January to observe the airfield for up to three days. It would catalog flights and the number of people and vehicles present at any given time. Because of the relative openness of the terrain, a single OP from the treeline to the end of the airfield was considered enough. A reaction platoon would be about five kilometers away, with the retransmission element, in case it had to reinforce the antiarmor section because of enemy contact.

If the pattern of daily activity held true, on 16 January the battalion would conduct a cordon and search of the airfield (Figure 2). Only one company-sized element was available for the operation (one company was in Baledogle for airfield security and another was conducting port security in Marka). The cordon would have three blocking positions, one inserted by air and two by ground. The western flank of the cordon, consisting mainly of open ground, would be secured by helicopters.

Unfortunately, during the early morning hours of the 14th, the HMMWV (high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle) that was inserting the antiarmor section got stuck in a conspicuous place along the trail. Although it was camouflaged as well as possible, it was likely to attract attention, and we did not want to lose the element of surprise. Company A immediately launched along the beach to link up with the reaction platoon and get into position east of the OP. A resupply convoy, which was headed to the Baledogle airstrip under the battalion executive officer (XO), was dragged into providing the southern

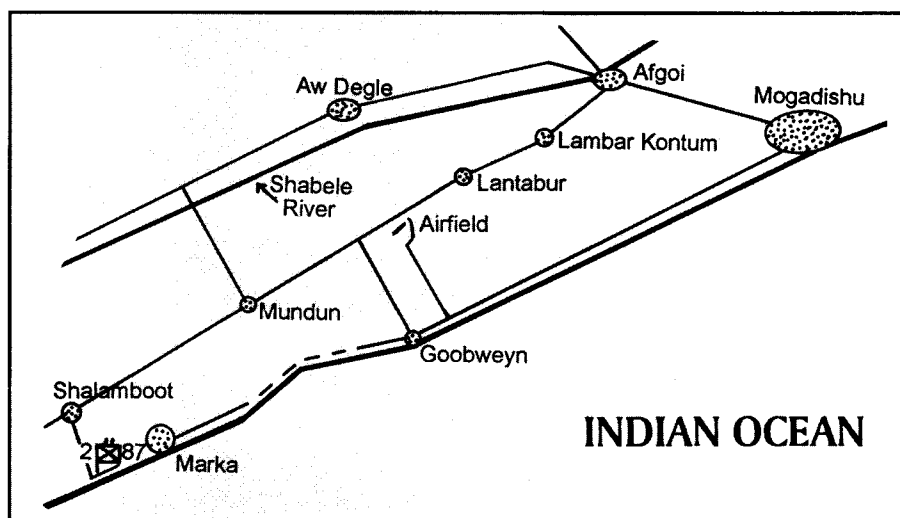


Figure 1

blocking position. Coordination was made for aircraft, but the only ones available were two UH-60s that made daily logistics flights, and these were given to us until 1200. When the antiarmor section reported a tremendous amount of activity at the airfield, the commander decided the operation would be carried out at 1100, the earliest that all ground elements would be in position and the aviation elements able to execute.

The adjusted scheme of maneuver developed for the operation was fundamentally the same. Company A would provide the majority of the forces, with the Baledogle convoy occupying a blocking position along the main road south of the airfield. The company would move along the coast in HMMWVs and approach the airfield along the dirt track until they were short of the OP. The Baledogle convoy would hold in the vicinity of Mundun and then move up the road until it reached the blocking position. Simultaneously, Company A's air assault platoon was to land on the road south of Lantabur and north of the airfield. Upon discharging the troops, the helicopters would move off to positions west of the airfield to discourage escape attempts over the open ground. Once the troops were dropped off, Company A was to move in from the east and sweep through the airfield complex, searching all vehicles and huts for weapons and detaining any bandits who offered resistance.

The operation went off almost flawlessly: The two logistics helicopters dropped the air assault platoon at the same time the convoy rolled into position and set up a blocking position to the south. As soon as the Somalis saw the helicopters fly in and land the troops, the airfield came alive with vehicles leaving as fast as they could. Most of them traveled north and were stopped and searched by the northern blocking position. A few tried to go west away from the troops. Company A moved in from the east and began its search of the airfield and the few vehicles that remained. All key blocking positions in the cordon were established almost simultaneously.

The helicopters performed their role flawlessly, pursuing vehicles that tried to escape in their direction and herding them back to the road and our checkpoints. The aircraft were assisted by elements of the 3d Battalion, 17th Cavalry, which was conducting operations in the area. After hasty face-to-face coordination on the ground, the cavalry commander agreed to provide one gunship and two scouts to help our battalion maintain the western end of the cordon. The five helicopters were quite intimidating and succeeded in keeping the Somali vehicles on the road. They were also a key factor in discovering the Somali bandits who were inclined to fight. No vehicle that was inside the cordon escaped the search.

The vast majority of the vehicles searched carried nothing but khat, which

we let the occupants keep. We picked up about a dozen discarded rifles on the road leading to the checkpoint, but found the really big haul in two abandoned dump trucks at the airport—box after box of small arms ammunition, hundreds of rifle grenades and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rounds, along with three heavy machineguns, an RPG-7, and a 75mm recoilless rifle. Apparently, we had interrupted a major weapon shipment from an arms cache in our area of operation (AO) to the warlord forces in Mogadishu.

The search of all the vehicles stopped by our checkpoints concluded around 1400, and all elements returned to the battalion base site at 1530. We learned several valuable lessons from this cordon and search effort:

Human intelligence is vital to this type of operation. All of the intelligence we used could be directly attributed to a human source or to U.S. confirmation of such a report. The importance of having interpreters in a unit cannot be overstated. This operation could not have occurred without the excellent intelligence gathered by the companies and their interpreters in the course of daily operations.

The antiarmor sections of light infantry companies are useful for reconnaissance operations in a low-intensity conflict environment. The additional 13 men give the company commander a dedicated reconnaissance element. This dedicated element was especially important to our operation, because the battalion scout platoon was already committed to another mission.

Detailed reconnaissance of routes to and from the objective area should be conducted whenever possible. Whenever a vehicle passes through an area or down a road in an AO, the occupants should report the road's trafficability and terrain conditions to the S-2 as part of a standard debrief. (The HMMWV that got stuck was on a trail that had not been reconnoitered.)

The units on all sides of the cordon must emplace themselves as quickly, and as simultaneously, as possible. Otherwise, enemy elements may manage to slip out on the unoccupied side.

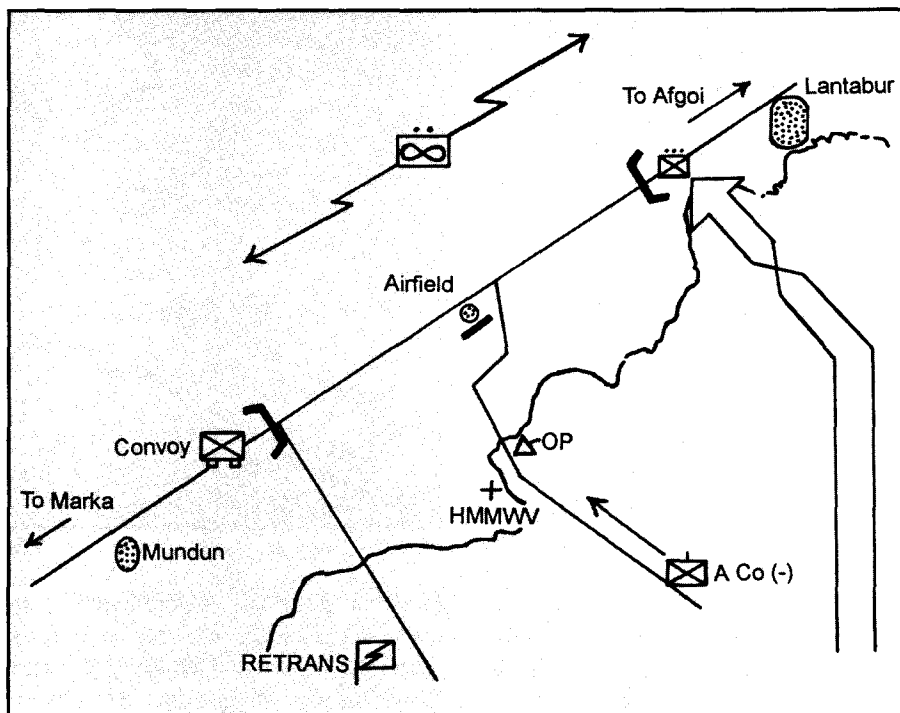


Figure 2

If the cordon is emplaced by dissimilar means (air and vehicle), their movements must be synchronized.

Ideally, all sides of the cordon should have ground elements. In our case, securing one side of the cordon with screening helicopters was an expedient made necessary by the lack of troops available, and made possible by the openness of the ground. To prevent holes in the cordon, each unit must have visual contact with its flanking neighbors.

HMMWVs are the best ground vehicles for this type of operation. In Somalia, HMMWVs were far more mobile than any local vehicle we encountered. Their ability to maneuver over rough terrain and to seal the encirclement quickly with mounted infantry was decisive in this operation. Somali vehicles, even those with four-wheel drive, are almost all roadbound, and a cordon that blocks all roads should be effective in limiting vehicle escapes. Because of poor maintenance and overloading, few of these vehicles were capable of cross country movement.

A checkpoint or blocking position does not have to be large; a squad with an automatic weapon is enough. A vehicle should be included in each

blocking position or checkpoint, if possible, to imply mobility and firepower by its presence.

Everyone involved in an operation of this sort must be responsive to changes in plans. When the execution date for our cordon and search operation was moved up, the scheme of maneuver had to be modified almost "on the fly." Subordinate commanders have to be able to react to quick fragmentary orders. Because the synchronization of elements sometimes occurs during movement, all leaders involved in the operation must also have a clear understanding of the commander's intent. Although the schedule and the details of our operation changed, the overall intent—establishing a simultaneous group of blocking positions around the airfield—remained the same.

Often critical assets, such as aircraft, are limited by competing demands in theater. Although we had four aircraft laid on for the morning of the 16th, they could not be dedicated to us for a three-day period. In addition to the logistics aircraft we got for two hours, a scout-gunship team was placed under our operational control, and another OH-58 was loaned to us for command and control when the cavalry

commander and his aircraft showed up to coordinate training in our AO. Although all of these were obtained well inside the normal request windows, all operations staffs recognized the fleeting nature of the tactical opportunity. The accelerated coordination of air assets to execute the operation two days early was an excellent example of cooperation between units.

Four UH-60s should be placed under the operational control of the battalion for the duration of the operation so it will be better able to react to changes in the situation. In spite of the coordination successes and the cooperation of the aviation element, we were lucky to be able to proceed with this operation: If the aviation battalion had not had a logistics run to Marka scheduled that morning and agreed to let us use the aircraft for troop movement, the operation probably would have been canceled.

Operation staff members should always look for ways to blend the assets used for one mission into another, if it will not detract from the completion of either mission. In an environment such as Somalia, where a battalion can be conducting three or four operations at the same time, this blending of assets can be important. For example, the resupply convoy to Bale-dogle provided the perfect ad hoc south-

ern blocking position along the main road. All that was needed was some quick coordination with the XO, and the convoy performed its role flawlessly.

Helicopter gunships are a tremendous psychological advantage, especially in open country. The bandits in Somalia would abandon their weapons rather than fight the gunships. The gunships were also instrumental in herding any stray vehicles back onto the road.

Because of the distances from the objective area, retransmission elements are often needed for effective communications between the reconnaissance element and the battalion headquarters. These elements must be emplaced clandestinely, preferably at night, off the beaten path and camouflaged, in positions that are known through prior reconnaissance to fit the required communications profile. They must also have attached security elements.

Mine detectors are sometimes essential in searching for buried weapons in yards or under floors. Units should observe fresh-turned earth and sweep all fresh graves. Although mine detectors were not used in this operation, weapons were found in fresh graves during an operation in Kismayu.

TOW vehicles are useful in cordons established on terrain with greater intervisibility distances. If a TOW pla-

toon had been available for the airfield operation on 14 January, it could have been used on the western side of the cordon instead of the helicopters. If the cordon remains after dark, soldiers on these vehicles have the thermal sights to pick up movement and the mobility to go and check on it.

Troops need to learn to look for concealed weapons. Weapons can be found on roofs, under floors, in latrines, or broken down and hidden in wells and cisterns, wrapped in plastic bags.

This was the first of many successful cordon and search operations conducted by the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry. The common element in these operations was the greatest possible reconnaissance and intelligence gathering during the time available. Also contributing greatly to success were the simultaneous cordon around the area to be searched and the ability of leaders at all levels to react to rapid changes in the situation. The success of this operation and others was a testimony to the ability of these leaders to do just that.

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